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From fists to words : a revolutionized awareness based on peace

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From Fists to Words:
A Revolutionized Awareness Based on Peace



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Senior Capstone
Division of Humanities and Communication
Spring 2006

From Fists to Words:
A Revolutionized Awareness Based on Peace



Door. 2005. Kristen LaFollette.

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Senior Capstone

Creative Writing and Social Action

Professor Frances Payne Adler

Division of Humanities and Communication

Spring 2006

Dedication and Acknowledgements

My personal transformation as an aware student and advocate has been guided particularly by several professors. I am indebted to Kathryn Poethig, for courses which inspired me to pursue global issues of peace, Frances Payne Adler who relentlessly pressed me to write, and reintroduced me to my own history, and Rina Benmayor for offering me the space to discover new allies and sources of power I had not recognized before.

I would like to thank my family, especially Antonia and Eppolito Giannini, Anna, Robert and Paul LaFollette, Cristina Pompa and Ryan Lewis for constructing my network of support.

This project is dedicated to Robert “Fighting Bob” La Follette, whose legacy pushes me daily to strive for social change, and Natasha Fischer whom I hope will continue her path of community involvement.

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Introduction

The acceptance of peace has led me on a journey which has enabled the reconstruction of my relationships, based on self awareness through personal analysis and reflection. Through my own experience and the interdisciplinary focus of my education at CSUMB, I have been able to weave an understanding of the applications of peace. I have found that peace encompasses a process, by which I have been able to examine certain events in my life and catalogue the inner transformations I have undergone. Opening up to peace has provided opportunities for compassion through the awareness that we all suffer as humans. Realizing the interconnected power of love, nonviolence and altruism has created a personal urgency for peace and imparted the knowledge that another world is possible.

Through my creative writing, I hope to provide an example which demonstrates my personal process of transformation, through the acceptance of peace, to serve as an inspiration for those who are willing to undergo a similar internal revolution. This project embodies my inner process and catalogs personal realizations about peace and violence, which begin during childhood and lead up to the present time. It articulates my current questions and fears and illustrates concepts connected to my present awareness regarding peace. My creative portfolio captures a number of instances by which I have reexamined my life, related to the social undercurrents of violence and peace. The poems encounter instances which awakened my consciousness regarding social justice issues, and record periods where my relationship to peace was problematized and changed.

The first poem, *Tiny Fists*, documents an instance in the second grade when I was beaten up by a group of boys, whom I had considered my friends. For reasons I did not understand, they became conscious that they had the power to hurt me, and planned to ambush me one afternoon on the field where we used to play. Though I was crushed by their betrayal, I realized I had to defend myself. My mother enrolled me in karate to learn self-defense. The boys soon attempted to attack me again, but this time I lashed out, scaring them away. After I acted in self defense, I was never assaulted by the boys again, but the incident set in motion a negative pattern of resistance, which would take many years for me to recognize. Through this incident I succumbed to the idea that violence counteracts to violence, and if I desired for others to respect me, I would need to prove I was tough. Though I felt empowered, I perhaps contributed to reliance on aggression.

From this poem I encounter the Columbine massacre in Colorado. When the tragedy took place, I was sixteen years old and had often felt ostracized within my own high school community. I was moved to speak out about the incident and how it reflected failures within society to create safe spaces for teens, and include them into the productive aspects of our culture. I wrote a letter to the local paper in which I called on all members of society to take responsibility for our social environment.

The poem that follows is entitled *Reflex*, and explores cultivating the skills needed to respond through nonviolence and offer compassion. Thich Nhat Hanh discussed that nonviolence can eventually become instinctive and replace the habits of violence and selfishness through mindful conscious meditation. Just as soldiers are trained to kill, peace workers can to be provided with the skills to counteract violent

socialization. Michael Nagler also wrote that in order for nonviolence to become an impulse, it must be practiced over and over.

Call Me Inequity explores my reactions to Hurricane Katrina. Though I initially desired to blame the government for people's suffering, I have reexamined my role as a beneficiary of our unequal society. By participating in our culture, I permit these inequities to continue. I am complicit as well.

180 is a monologue which was originally created in the HCOM 432S *Voices of Peacemakers* Service Learning Class. The narrative is the result of a transcribed interview I conducted with my cousin Natasha Fischer, who had experienced a paradigm shift based on her volunteer work with the Red Cross in Louisiana. My cousin entered this foreign and stressful situation with apprehension, but benefited immensely from accepting the opportunity to serve. Hurricane Katrina enabled her to activate the love she exudes through responsibility to others. Her story is the proof of my own understanding of the power of peace. It catalyzed profound realizations within myself, and proved that peace work can be transformative.

Ethical Will, expresses hope for my future children. It involves the need to see them carry on and expand my desire for social justice. Through the poem I also bestow the heritage of Robert Marion La Follette, who led the Progressive Party in Wisconsin and garnered a reputation as an outspoken defender of the people.

I Am Afraid finishes the creative portfolio and communicates my current fears. In the poem I articulate some of the apprehensions I have about graduation, particularly resulting from losing the structure and venues afforded by CSUMB. I wonder whether I will continue to grow in my actualization of peace, or if I will shrink into complacency in order to please those around me.

Creative Portfolio

Tiny Fists



Brown Belt Test. 1995. Kristen LaFollette.

Tiny Fists

We usually met at the dugout.
Five boys and I would spend each lunch
running among the itchy crab grass
divided into temporary teams
to kick red bouncing balls
amongst the baseball field
behind the blacktop playground

One afternoon I entered the field
The air was still. No children were around.
All I heard was the crunch of my jelly sandals
on the dry grass. *Where are they?*
Some of them had huddled and realized
they were boys after all. Why not use this girl
as a measure of their strength?
The group stood covertly along a classroom wall
motionless with shallow silent breaths.
The boy with the big head, who gargled when he spoke
ran up and pinned my arms back.
The five then circled me in a tight coil
like sharks. I thrashed
but couldn't escape.

Amidst the hot air, heavy with the sweet
and sour residue of grass,
each pummeled my chest and stomach
in turn. No one yelled or cheered.
Just sunk tiny fists into my body intently,
my jacket muffled their strikes.
I tried to fix my eyes on the yard duty
who stood over on the blacktop
and rocked from one foot
to another, engrossed in a dodgeball
game. She never turned
to face the field.

With each punch they grunted,
jaws clenched and cheeks flared.
I crumpled over and gasped.
We're sorry. Sorry. Don't Cry. Don't Tell.
One short boy with dark hair and thick
eyebrows, feverishly picked me up, and wiped

the tears of my face as hard as he could.

My insides had become tangled knots.
The boys dusted off my back and legs
made sure I could stand. The bell
rang. They scattered and ran back to class.
You won't tell... right?
I walked off the field alone and spoke to no one.
At home I buckled in the entry way
Mom gave me a bath
while I heaved in breaths between sobs.
As I soaked in the clear hot water
my face and chest flamed bright red.
I gasped terribly and told her what had happened.
The next week, she enrolled me
in the local karate kenpo dojo.

Evenings poised on large floor mats
slippery with sweat,
I reveled to pin tall boys
to the ground, pull hair,
and squish their faces
into the floor.
I learned to thrust my tiny fists
through wood and cinder blocks,
kick the knee to break it,
jam noses into brains
and scratch out eyes.
Now I knew how to hurt.

At lunch, I returned to the dugout
and again met still silent air.
The group had reconvened and shadowed me
from behind the classroom wall.
The boy with the big head ran up
and pinned me back.
Rather than writhe in his grip,
I sent an elbow
straight back into his stomach,
and scraped my foot down his shin
to stomp his toes
until he jumped back with a shriek
and clutched his leg.
The other boys ran up with mouths agape.
Now we each knew how to hurt.

Columbine High School: April 20th, 1999



Columbine. 2006. Beedle Um Bum.

Columbine High School: April 20th, 1999

Two Columbine High School students kill twelve classmates and a teacher before killing themselves.

It makes me very sad to know that it takes a tragedy like what happened in Littleton, Colorado to get people's attention... People need to realize if we don't change now, this will happen again... We should take responsibility as a community, and see that one child is everyone's child. We all must help prevent problems...We rely on others when we need to rely on ourselves.....Society makes us angry, frustrated, isolated, and depressed, but it doesn't show us how to cope with these feelings. People lash out when they feel trapped. They feel they have no other alternatives.

-Kristen LaFollette, Letter to the Editor Brentwood News May 13th, 1999

The Blue Columbine grows
in Colorado.
Clutches of flowers huddle together
like students cowered
below lunch tables and lab clusters.
Blooms outstretch as the feathers of doves.
Layers of gentle sky-colored petals
rest above indigo
calyx. Golden stamens
mirror daylight on the peaks
of Colorado mountains.

Columbine High School.
In the library,
Kyle
is splayed beside
a row of desks
and stacks of encyclopedias.
Rachel
lays limp on the grassy field.
The carpet, cement,
and soil become scarlet.

One thousand two hundred
and sixty-seven miles away,
along California roadways,
collections of solitary poppy
plants shine up like orange beacons.
Four petals balance
atop slender blue-green stems

from rocky earth and ground.

Liberty High School.

Sabrina

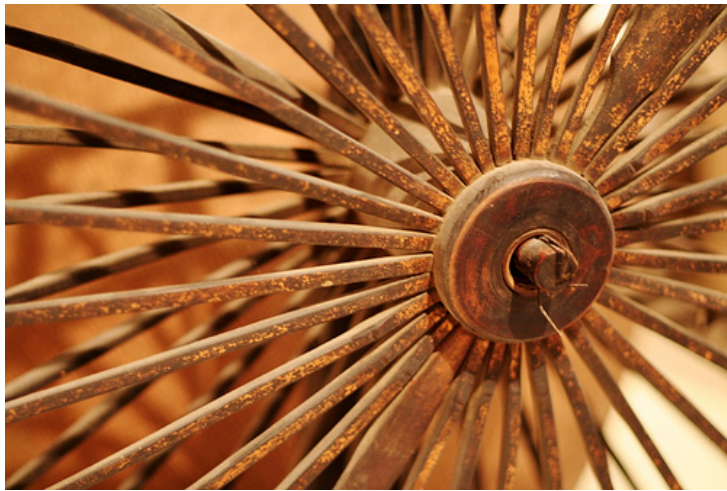
hides the scars on her arms
with long black sleeves.

Jason

spends each lunch in the library
hidden between chemistry books
and mystery novels.

Together we will plant
poppies and columbines
orange and blue
blossoms
to turn scarlet earth back.

Reflex



Loom. 2005. Surain Rajadurai.

Reflex

The more successful your inner cultivation the less deliberately and consciously you have to go about making it an outward expression. In other words, the deeper your spirituality, the more it will manifest automatically.

-Michael Nagler, "Force of the Heart"

I.

She sits beside her spindle
pedal worn to a smooth dip
variegated with wooden grain.
Fingers, intimate with the curls
of wool, twist and refine
coarse bundles into thread.

Her leg moves up and down
with a gentle rhythm
to pump the wheel.
Each turn and twirl of her fingers
has become a reflex.
Her body remembers
and weaves each task into the other.

II.

She stands beside her brother
in the half-light of the kitchen doorway.
Arm across his shoulder
they hang up the phone.
Ears attentive to his coarse words
which tangle the air.

Her hand moves up and down his arm
in a gentle rhythm.
Voice soothes without reminder.
Her arms arrange themselves in a hug,
the embrace has become a reflex.
Her body remembers
and guides her limbs to comfort.

Call Me Inequity



FEMA. 2005. Mamish.

Call Me Inequity

I am Katrina
hit Louisiana, Alabama
and Mississippi
August 29th, 2005.
I am the strongest storm ever
to strike the Gulf Coast.

I am Veronica
huddled on the overpass,
with my five children.
Just one blanket, a flashlight
and a box of crackers among us.
Last night, while my babies slept,
I leaned over the bridge
and almost jumped.

In the morning I waded through the streets
to the grocery store. Asked the policeman,
greasy with sweat, who clutched his rifle
if I could just go in and get water
for my babies.
Get shot, or go back he said.

I am Tony
stuck at the Convention Center
with my mother, and little sister Grace.
Yesterday afternoon,
In the midst of the heat
my Grandma started to shake, and
beads of sweat gathered on her face.
There was no insulin to give her.

After sundown, while Mom sang to Grace
I wrapped Grandma in my t-shirt,
and lay her gently on the sidewalk
next to another corpse
that had bloated
in the summer sun.

I am President Bush
This morning I flew over New Orleans

in Air Force One
where I saw Lake Pontchartrain
intermingled with the city.
From so high up, it was hard
to make out if bodies
or tree trunks floated through the streets
of each Parish.

I am Michael Brown
Unfortunately, I can attribute
many deaths
to people who did not heed
warnings to evacuate the city.

I am Lionell
who didn't have money
to fuel up and leave the city.
It didn't matter,
since I couldn't afford
a hotel room either.
My wife Betty and I
waited on our rooftop for two days.
Coast Guard helicopters
encircled our block, passed
but didn't pick us up.



Natasha Fischer. 2006. Kristen LaFollette.

Natasha Fischer/Kristen Ana LaFollette

For many years, it had been feared that a large storm would hit the Gulf Coast of the United States. New Orleans was particularly vulnerable and relied on an antiquated levee system which was the city's only defense against the ocean and Lake Pontchartrain. On August 29th, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall. This category 4 hurricane was one of the largest storms ever to strike the coastal regions of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Poverty is prevalent in Gulf Coast communities, and numerous people do not have adequate access to healthcare. Many communities in this region are also largely African American. On August 31st, the levees failed and nearly 80% of New Orleans flooded. Government response to the disaster was slow, and people, who did not have the means to evacuate, were stranded for several days in homes, the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center. It has been perceived that the inadequate government response was based on the race and economic status of the affected citizens. (Payne, Washington Post) It has also been said that national response efforts were hampered by current US military involvement in Iraq. National aid organizations accepted much of the responsibility to respond to people's immediate needs. Fueled by volunteers, agencies like the Red Cross stepped in to comfort and serve the people.

Natasha is nineteen years old. She was enrolled in a college course and was given an assignment to volunteer her time in the community. At the local Red Cross, she was presented with the chance to serve in Plaquemine, Louisiana. Natasha decided to seize the opportunity, and left her home in Modesto, California, for the volunteer shelter in Louisiana three days later. There she worked to serve hurricane survivors from New Orleans, many of whom had been at the Superdome.

She is five feet tall, thin, and has long, thick red hair and freckles. Her voice emits energy and she speaks rapidly, but in a comfortable and confident manner. Natasha's voice is gravelly and sometimes hoarse and she speaks as if talking to a close girlfriend.

So we drove to Plaquemine, and that's when I got nervous.
I was anticipating it, anticipating it, excited
and then we pulled into the driveway to get in, you know...
my stomach just went to my throat.

Because it was like, OK

*I'm about to enter a shelter
with, I don't even know how many people,
but I know it's a mass amount of people and I don't know
what the situation's gonna be whether it's diseased people,
whether it's people going insane. You know what I mean?
Cuz you don't know the situation... and 99% of my shelter
was black people, they told me that before I left.*

I mean that doesn't bug me at all, but...

it was just like, OK *I'm uh a little white girl.*

...I felt like, my hands

were getting all sweaty and I felt, I just felt like

I hope I can do this.

... I remember ... walking in,
and... after a couple of hours of working
in that same shelter, my perspective completely did a 180,
you know what I mean?... we all walked in together,
and things were cr-azy there was people everywhere, running
everywhere, kids running everywhere... Yeah,
it was like overwhelmingness like *Oh my gosh*
All these people, all this stuff, all these cots, all these kids,
...these people have gone through hell... Like, I just couldn't believe it.
...and then after that I just started walking around
and people were actually like talking to me and stuff,
like everything changed.
I got this feeling of comfortable...And that's weird
... I feel like as comfortable as I would in my own house.

[One woman's] name was Brenda...
And she was always like,
Hey Darlin. Hey Baby Girl you know...
I walked in the bathroom. I just said, *Hi.*
How are you doing?
She said, *Hi. How are you doing?* and then,
the conversation just never stopped....
The thing that really got me the most was *I can't find my babies.*
I can't find my babies. You know (*subdued voice*).
Like these women who have kids and babies,
and they can't find them. That is horrible, you know.
It's mind blowing, I just...I don't know.
... I hug em and I kiss em and I tell em that we're going
to do everything we can to find [your] babies for you (*voice picks up*).
(*Pause*) You know, we did.

We found a lot of people's kids and a lot of people's families.
Because we got the computers donated to us, so we jumped
on websites. We found so many people's families, it was
awesome, it was unbelievable. ... And then, um, by the end
of the couple days, I remember she came up to me
and told me, *I found my family! I can stop*
crying myself to sleep every night. That totally, like wow, you know.
That like totally like changed...that totally like affected me.
Completely. Completely.

...I was really upset...Because I didn't want to leave
... Like I wasn't crying, but I was really, I, I, I, I
... I put out that I wasn't upset, but I was upset.
Because I felt really connected with these people, and when I left
I just used, because we had the microphone that we used all the time

to get everybody's attention, I just got on the microphone
and said, *Oh, I love you guys, and You guys are wonderful.*
And I have to go back to California, but I just want to let everybody know
that I love everybody and you guys are wonderful people.
That's how I left, and I walked out...And I just, I feel
that peace is only going to be gained and going to, um, be considered
like a world of peace, if like, if people can realize that people
make things harder than what it is
...People, they just, they just, they... I don't know, people are people.

I Am Afraid



Bowl. 2006. Kristen LaFollette.

I Am Afraid

I am afraid that when I wake up
my urge to go back to sleep
will overtake the need to get out of bed,
to attend tonight's meeting
to plan for tomorrow's rally.

I am afraid I'll want to roll over
and sink into my pillow
snug in-between sheets, comforted
by the cadence of the dishwasher
and the roar of the vacuum.

I am afraid that I am not a real feminist
who thrives on confronting rapists
who penetrate our homes, as a natural
bodily function, like breathing or eating.

I am afraid my need to write checks
will overtake my need to write poems.
That I would rather peruse the dry goods
aisle at the grocery store
than write a letter to my congressperson.

I am afraid that when I graduate
I will have the comfort of my diploma,
and become content to swim
in the buzz of my television.

I fear my need to pay rent each month
will compel me to hoard money
and become engrossed in the ritual
of work and sleep,
work and sleep.

I am afraid I will move home
and again become part of the bipolar city
where you are either Mexican or White
and I feel like neither.

I am afraid I am not a real peacemaker
who dives into refugee shelters
with fear, but without hesitation.

I am afraid my ears will become numb
and refuse to listen.

I am afraid that in restaurants
worried to slice conversation
like the steak on my plate,
when people speak of how damn liberals
will ruin this state through gun control
I will curb my tongue with my spoon.

I am afraid I would rather sink
into my soup
than speak up.

Ethical Will



Robert La Follette and Kristen LaFollette. 2005. Kristen LaFollette.

Ethical Will

It is my hope that this story of such public service as I have been able to render Wisconsin and the country, may aid to enlist others to give the best that is in them to the cause of human rights and true democracy.

-Robert M. La Follette

Dear Daughter and Son, who are not yet born:

This is
my ethical will.
I leave you no dollar bills
or vacation homes on mountainsides.
I do not own a single strand
of pearls. There are no diamond
encrusted rings to bestow,
and no shoebox
of old bonds
hidden under my bed.

Instead, I summon you to our family
legacy to call out for justice
even if your voice grows hoarse.
Your great cousin
Robert LaFollette
entrusted us
with this Progressive heritage.

They called him *Fighting Bob*
because he wouldn't surrender
under Senate censure or the ridicule
of political cartoons.
People told him to be quiet,
but he never hushed himself
into reprieve or silence.

Bob would hop over barbed wire
and trek through weeds
to reach fields and listen
to farmers who plowed
and sowed
Wisconsin soil.

Bob knew that injustice
is present everywhere

No need to board a ship
or plane to save helpless
children who starve
in television shantytowns.
Hunger beats on our own doorstep
while silence draws the shades
on our windows.

He would want me to tell you
peace is not an imposition
of open mouths
before open ears.
The voices are there
they may be suffocated by large hands
or masked by cries and fists.
But they still speak.

Creative Non-Fiction Personal Essay

Creative Non-Fiction Personal Essay

Last Spring, I sat engaged in a classroom discussion where students were asked to consider whether peace and nonviolence are realistic. All semester the GS 350 *Religion, Violence and Peacemaking* course had focused on fundamentalist violence worldwide, and had now shifted to examine nonviolent solutions offered by religious communities. One student offered her opinion regarding nonviolence, “Peace is a nice ideal, but I just don’t think it is possible right now. I don’t know if it would work on a large scale, and honestly, what would you do if someone shoved the barrel of a rifle in your face?” Her statement immediately triggered a reaction in me.

I have never been threatened with a gun or a knife, and have not personally experienced violent repression firsthand, but I felt that her statement revealed something important about the lack of peace in our community. It exposed to me that widespread peace has not been achieved because people simply don’t believe it works. We place restrictive boundaries around peace and limit its effectiveness, by claiming that nonviolence only works in isolated instances and communities far away from the realities of our own lives. Perhaps, if we continue to assume that peace will not work in difficult situations or in the face of violence, we may never give it a chance to work at all. I wondered if people have been afraid to move away from violence, the assumed normal way of reacting to conflict.

My classmate’s statement set in motion a period of self reflection. I examined conflicts in my own life wherein I encountered violent and nonviolent resolutions. I began to question how and why I had allowed violence to penetrate my own mindset and influence my actions for so long. Although I do not consider myself a violent person,

I realized that I have resorted to violence to defend myself, and have acted aggressively when protecting my own opinions. Through this self-analysis, I began to deconstruct the aggressive frameworks I had formed for myself. I was now willing to allow peace theories a space in myself and concluded that peace will only work in my life if I commit myself to believe that it is the best and only course of action.

Through the acceptance of the power of peace, ideas I encountered catalyzed profound transformations in the way I now choose to think and act. I had never anticipated that my perceptions of the world would change so rapidly or profoundly. However, once I came across the theories of several philosophers, I became engulfed in personal transformation. I was able to benefit from change because I allowed myself to be open. Though I did not enter this process with intent to change myself, when presented with the evidence for the necessity of peace, I found myself converting automatically. I was able to change because I allowed myself to be open and vulnerable to the elements of peace. This vulnerability allowed me to analyze the behaviors and mindsets I had previously subscribed to.

This project intends to demonstrate my personal process of transformation, through the acceptance of peace, to serve as an inspiration for those who are willing to undergo a similar internal revolution. My creative portfolio captures a series of events which caused me to reexamine how my life benefits from and privileges undercurrents of violence and peace. Through my desire to recognize peace as a way of life, I am slowly retraining myself to make decisions based on patience and a concern for others.

Though, it had once been easy for me to criticize people and blame others for decisions that affect all of us, I have now accepted greater responsibility for the conditions present in my life and community. I have recognized that I may better serve

people by being an ally, rather than a leader. I once used judgmental attacks to coerce others in an attempt to change their minds. Yet, I now see that the presentation of affirmative options combined with the willingness of the listener is much more effective towards inducing change. The ability to care for others in my life no longer involves telling them what to do, or always knowing what is right. It requires a readiness to listen, along with the patience to offer what another asks for, not what I assume they need. By allowing peace to replace my old habits, I now see that although I disagree strongly with many people, we each suffer. In recognizing our common humanity and suffering we can find mutual ground on which to understand each other.

Through my research and personal journey, I have concluded that peace harnesses a transformative synergy. This collaborative spirit results from the acceptance of collective responsibilities in combination with the energy and power of love, nonviolence and altruism. Peace, love, nonviolence and altruism are interconnected concepts, and a common understanding of their definition is necessary. In the framework of this project, peace represents the ultimate outpouring of love, nonviolence and altruism. In addition, rather than simply describing the absence of war in any given, fleeting timeframe, peace is a term with multiple facets. It encompasses the presence of justice and balance, along with the realization of love for ones environment. Peace involves the practice of maintaining violence-free dealings with others and fosters inner tranquility.

Love can also be seen in a new context. Love in relation to peace is not romantic love. It is love expressed for each member of the human community which binds us to support one another and respect our mutual rights to peaceful existence. Nonviolence is an active process. It necessitates an inner motivation to avoid harm, combined with the

choice to behave in ways that do not harm others. Therefore it combines internal intentions with outer actions. Finally, altruism is the desire to put others before the needs of one's own self. Altruistic actions enable us to operate for the interests of others, therefore benefiting the larger community.

The article, "Peacemaking through Nonviolence" by Michael Nagler, provided me with the foundation to accept the force of nonviolence, and became the primary inspiration for this project. Nagler's article was an assigned reading for the Global Studies course and was connected to the class discussion which sparked my interest in peace and internal analysis. In the piece, Nagler particularly confronts the ideology of UN peacekeeping forces as inconsistent and ineffective due to their flawed reliance on violent coercion. Nagler notes that due to our social adherence to violence as the most powerful exertion of force, peace is mistakenly viewed as weak and ineffective. Similarly, in the article, coercion is distinguished from persuasion. These two modes of influence are described in the theories of Force One and Force Two power. Force One represents compulsory coercive force, the current international model of power, while Force Two enables the use of persuasive power, based on love. Through nonviolence, we can enact Force Two power.

I was captivated by Nagler's innovative perceptions of love and nonviolence. Nagler distinguishes love as the conception of integrative power and a concern for other people rather than simply a notion of romance. This new definition of love struck me as revolutionary, and I recognized that it can be utilized as a motivation for altruistic action and care for all people. By recognizing that peace based on love is powerful, one may then move forward to accept responsibilities for others through altruism. The activation of peace would cause a transformation of individuals, communities, nations and the

greater globe. Similarly, Nagler's description of Force One and Force Two Power caused me to examine the control violence exhibits over our psyches and actions. My final paper for the course became "Nonviolence as Power", in which I explored the doubts our society holds in regards to nonviolence. I came to the conclusion that the only limits to the activation of peace on a large scale are the ways in which we prohibit nonviolence and peace to exert their power over our communities and minds.

I was interested in understanding more of Nagler's approach to nonviolence. I read excerpts from his book Is There No Other Way?, in which he provides many examples of situations where nonviolence enables us to tap into enormous power. I also encountered a recorded interview with *What is Enlightenment*. During the dialogue Nagler was questioned on the effectiveness of nonviolent methods when confronted by difficult and violent situations. Nagler responded by stating, "The way to find out what nonviolence is and how it works, is not to start by thinking up a situation where it couldn't work, but then what have you got? Nothing" (Phipps, Force of the Heart). Through outright doubts of the effectiveness and practicality of nonviolence, it is easy to miss opportunities to put peace into action. Nagler also commented that many tend to view nonviolence as a possible strategy and tool when confronting situations, however he asserts that nonviolence must be viewed as a way of life. It is a commitment to action that must be adhered to in all situations without exception.

A statement he made in this interview inspired me to write the poem *Reflex*. Nagler had mentioned the need to practice nonviolence in order to replace our initial reactions of violence with instincts of peace. He asserted, "The more successful your inner cultivation the less deliberately and consciously you have to go about making it an outward expression. In other words, the deeper your spirituality, the more it will

manifest automatically” (Phipps). I approached the poem with a vision to link practice and repetition to the task of spinning wool into thread. The thread maker hones their skill from years of practice untangling rough bunches of wool into yarn and fibers. Once the body has done something enough times, it seems to become an instinct or reflex. I related the routine of this skill to listening and responding out of compassion, which can be practiced and ingrained.

I soon began to take note of the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh, another practitioner of nonviolence. His book Love In Action amazed me with a complexity of insights expressed through the approachable nature of Nhat Hanh’s words. The book seemed to weave together the questions and solutions I had been seeking, and enlivened the need for peace and transformation within myself. Love in Action aided me in appreciating the integral role love plays in the realization of genuine peace. I was able to accept that love, vulnerability, nonviolence and compassion are interconnected. Each of these qualities affects choice, action and mindset. Nhat Hanh states that love can be a valuable lens through which we may view the world. It provides us with insights that are not possible without the tools of love (10). Genuine, selfless love requires bravery and requires the willingness to place oneself at risk. This concept aided my realization that love demands vulnerability. Vulnerability allows for equality, and does not permit one to guard their ego. In order to love, I must let go of my fear and selfish reflexes. If I do not permit myself to be vulnerable, I am not willing to experience love. I had not deeply appreciated the associations between love and nonviolence before reading Nhat Hanh’s book. He discussed how love nurtures nonviolence, and lends power to action particularly when confronting hardship (39).

Nhat Hanh also introduced me to the idea of co-responsibility. We are all accountable for events that take place inside our communities and in our name. Through solidarity and love for others we can accept responsibility for the state of our community and begin to integrate solutions. Nhat Hanh's exemplary poem *Call Me by My True Names* communicates the need to support victims and perpetrators since we are all co-responsible for actions our community may choose. He wrote, "I am a mayfly metamorphosing/on the surface of the river./And I am the bird/ that swoops down to swallow the mayfly" (*Call Me by My True Names*, 72). His words show solidarity and compassion for actors on all sides of societal events.

Call Me by My True Names inspired me to write *Call Me Inequity*, a poem that reacts to the violation and failures of local and national government response to Hurricane Katrina. When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast I was angry and ashamed at the lack of aid sent to serve the needs of the people. The aftermath of the hurricane exposed many people to the poverty that is such a part of the social structure of the Gulf Coast, and America in general. African American residents of New Orleans and the greater Gulf Region have been particularly affected by this unjust and deficient social inequity. Though I wanted to blame the president and the government for the suffering of people stranded in their homes, overheated and starved at the Convention Center and left to sleep on overpasses, I also had to take responsibility for benefiting from this unequal society. Poverty exists next to me everyday, and what do I do to change it? Do I intend to change it, or will I continue to benefit from my privilege? I realized that my actions as a community member allow violence to occur, yet I still have the power to create peace.

Nhat Hanh reminded me that although violence permeates our ways of living, it is absolutely possible to change our frameworks, “We create our own worlds with our visions, conceptions and thoughts. We might create a constricted world of suffering and sorrow, or one that is immense and free, a truly beautiful place”(Love in Action, 33). Nhat Hanh also allowed me to see that peace is not just a goal, or an end. It is a mindful way of life, best carried out through love and positive motivation (66). He wrote, “The way must be in you; the destination must also be in you and not somewhere else in space or time. If that kind of self-transformation is being realized in you, you will arrive.” (*On Building a Community of Love.*)

When the hurricane struck, I was enrolled in the *Voices of Peacemakers* HCOM 432 Service Learning class. The class required that we each assemble two monologues from peacemakers in the community. These were collected in collaboration with Global Majority to create a narrative of multiple experiences with peace work both global and local, utilizing compiled monologues from peacemakers. We would interview them, transcribe the interviews, and trim their words to create dramatic narratives involving peace. I found hope in the outpouring of compassion exhibited by these peacemakers and those who went to serve the displaced people in Louisiana.

I initially conducted an interview with my nineteen year old cousin, Natasha Fischer. She lives in Modesto and attends Modesto Junior College in pursuit of a forestry degree. One of her classes had required she volunteer her service to the community, and Natasha decided to approach the local Red Cross. At that time, Hurricane Katrina had just ravaged the Gulf Coast. Though the organization initially invited her to answer phones and file papers, my cousin was not interested in office work, and asked if there were any opportunities involving service directly within the

community. She was then offered the chance to depart for Louisiana, where she would serve in one of the emergency shelters set up for survivors of the hurricane. Fischer jumped at the chance, and in two days found herself on a plane to the devastated Gulf region. Though she did not have prior experience serving in a catastrophe, she dove right in without hesitation.

My cousin experienced an internal transformation when she served at the Louisiana shelter. In being open to the opportunity to serve others, she was able to change her perceptions of herself and the people she encountered. She told me that the entire time leading up to her experience, she had been excited, but once she physically approached the shelter, she became nervous. She had not been in much contact with African American communities before, and was unsure of how she would be perceived as a young white girl by the shelter clients. Yet, though she was fearful, Fischer was committed to carrying out her responsibilities. She was afraid to encounter chaos and trauma, and when she entered the shelter she found a seemingly swirling mass of adults and children. However, once she had time to talk with her clients, her fear was dissolved. The compassion she experienced serving others changed her permanently.

Fischer's story became the monologue *180*, and proved to me that by wholly accepting responsibility for life and assisting others, we each can experience immense internal change. She was not trained in nonviolence, or experienced in social movements. The choice to serve the Red Cross was not necessarily made in order to alter injustices when, Fischer merely responded to the suffering of others. I was immensely moved by her decisive choice to commit to altruism and take risks. Her story became the proof which verified my own experience and gave concrete evidence to my ideas. I decided that internal reconstruction is possible even when the subject has no original

intent to change. As long as a person allows themselves to be open to the experience of selfless motivation, and reaction based on concern for others, they will encounter an internal revolution.

While I was satisfied by the internal progress I had made, I still had questions which lingered, in relation to my life and the ways violence had shaped my choices. I wondered if peace can exist without violence. Does peace always need to be an oppositional answer to violence, or does it stand fully on its own?

The poem, *Tiny Fists* recalls an incident when I resorted to violence. One lunchtime in the second grade, a group of boys decided to beat me up. I'm not sure why they chose to hurt me, perhaps just because they could. I didn't know how to react to the assault. My mother told me I had to defend myself, and soon enrolled me in karate. Several days later, the boys found me and tried to assault me again. Bolstered by the encouragement to protect myself, I then attacked them back. They were in shock and never tried to harass me again. Though I was proud that I showed them they could not defeat me, I set up for myself a mindset of violent self defense that I would not recognize until now.

Through that conflict, I internalized an idea that in order to be empowered and gain the respect of my opponents, I had to use the force they relied on most. I subscribed to the notion that violence is a last resort in self-defense, therefore the most effective and powerful method to achieve change. In the poem I state, "Now we each knew how to hurt." The boys knew how to ambush me, and I knew how to injure them right back. Although they left me alone after that incident, neither of us was changed for the better. My actions did not prevent them from attacking other peers, and did not serve to create a better environment within the school. I played right into the cycle of violence.

Later on, in high school I endured quite a bit of social exclusion. I became depressed and felt lost in the social environment at my school. When I was sixteen, the Columbine High School massacre took place. I was appalled at the horrible way the shooters lashed out at their peers. I wondered what led them to hurt their community with such voracious anger. Then I questioned how the community had failed to involve teens in creating a safe space for difference. In reaction to the event, I wrote a letter to my local paper. Though some of my perspectives on ways to approach violence have changed, the letter embodies my sentiments about social responsibility, and captures a moment where I began to question violence in my life. Inspired by the letter, I wrote *Columbine High School: April 20th, 1999*. In that poem, I intended to reflect my connection to Columbine through the parallels of high school. I also connected the columbine flower, the state flower of Colorado and the school's namesake (a symbol of peace), with the California poppy, which grows in the wake of fires and disturbed ground.

While I have come to realize that nonviolence is now an essential part of my life, I still have fear over whether I will continue this path. I fear that I am too invested in the comfort I enjoy and pass up opportunities to serve others out of a need to protect my own interests. It is too easy to enjoy being comfortable. Although I continue to experience processes of change, I worry that I am too attached to my life of privilege and comfort. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy" (Strength to Love, 35). I worry that I am still selfish and concerned with preserving my own needs. Do I seek convenience before justice? It is too easy to become enveloped in the responsibilities of my everyday life.

I Am Afraid was inspired in part by the poem *Bad Communist*, by Aurora Levins Morales. She writes of the same doubts I hold. I imagine that real peace workers intuitively put others before themselves, and I know I am not there yet. However, I know Morales and many others continue to strive for social change, even though it often presents an obstacle. If they can resolve themselves to give up comfort, I can too.

In the poem *Ethical Will*, I hope to express my intentions for upcoming generations. Directed towards my future children, it expresses my need to reconcile violence today, with a hope for their peaceful existence. It offers homage to my ancestor Robert Marion La Follette, who greatly impacted the American political landscape in the early 1900s. He has become my personal hero in his staunch defense of the dignity of others, combined with his commitment to transparency in government. I feel that I have inherited his legacy of social justice, which I intend to pass on to my children. I do not have material belongings to leave for my children, and I hope that the most valuable gift I can bestow is the legacy to advocate for peace. They must carry on our traditions.

Through the creation of this project I continue to revolutionize my own awareness of nonviolence and renew my commitment to peace. I understand that my involvement in peace is not a one-time event, or the map to a destination. It encompasses choices I will face everyday. Love does not exclude other emotions like anger, but guides our susceptibility to it and frames our chosen actions. I have had to commit myself to the power of nonviolence and use it as my first and last choice. There is no need to resort to violence, only resort to peace. Peace involves creativity and choice (Phipps). Violence has been deeply engrained in my mind, and I will have to work continually to unravel the hold it has over me, while replacing my aggressive reactions with affirmative intentions of peace. I have only begun to tap into the potential of peace.

Peace, nonviolence and love offer practical and highly effective force, which is often ignored.

Annotated Bibliography- Primary and Craft Sources

Bowl. 2006. Image from the personal collection of Kristen LaFollette.

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Columbine. 2006. Larry “Beedle Um Bum”. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/folkbird/134546102/>> Retrieved April 26, 2006.

Door. 2005. Image from the personal collection of Kristen LaFollette.

FEMA. 2005. Mamish. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mamish/130493773/>> Retrieved April 20, 2006.

Fischer, Natasha. Personal interview. 25 Sep. 2005

This interview was conducted last semester for the Voices of Peacemakers HCOM 432S class, and became a dramatic monologue. During the audio taped interview, Fischer describes her journey as a Red Cross Volunteer in Louisiana immediately after Hurricane Katrina. Fischer’s interview expresses a willingness to help others and the transformations which took place within her understandings and the direction of her life. She had little experience with African American people

before working at the Louisiana shelter. Her perceptions of these people as well as her awareness of the needs of others “did a complete 180.” Her story serves as the proof of my assertions that the acceptance of love and nonviolent resources can bring dramatic transformations. Nonviolent social change is accessible to all people who are willing to accept the responsibility of love for humanity.

Hamill, Sam, ed. Poets Against the War. New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2003.

Poets Against the War is an anthology of poems submitted to Hamill in protest of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. It contains numerous poems which reflect on the need for peace and abhorrence to war. I was introduced to the book in Fall 2005 and appreciate the variety of voices represented in the poems who were not all professional poets, but people, moved to speak out. The exasperation of the writers spoke to me. They were disgusted by the war, “We are on a ship of state, careening wildly/toward disaster.../There are mutinous feelings in the hearts of many./The captain has gone mad” (132). This anthology provides evidence that people desire peace and a change from the tyranny of violence. It made me question the relation of peace to violence. Can peace exist without an opposing violent counterpart? Are we willing to move beyond anger to loving action?

Hooks, Bell. “On Building a Community of Love”. Interview. Shambhala Sun Online. 18 Aug. 2004. <http://www.shambhalasun.com/Archives/Features/2000/Jan00/hooks_hanh.htm>

(This interview was an expansion of “The Answer to Fear is Understanding.” It does however add some new insights into anger in social movements and the need for social justice to be based on peace and compassion.)

---. **“The Answer to Fear is Understanding”. Interview with Thich Nhat Hanh. Shambala Sun Online. 18 Aug 2004.**

<http://www.shambhalasun.com/revolving_themes/thich_nhat_hanh/hooks_answer_fear_understanding.htm>

In this transcribed conversation, bell hooks interviews Thich Nhat Hanh about compassion. They discuss the courage love requires and directly describe love and the community. There were many valuable statements made about the loss of community. Nhat Hanh states, “The reason we might lose this is because we are always looking outside of us, thinking the object or action of love is out there.” The dialogue allows me to think about the necessity of love in preserving the community. We don’t need to imagine that peace and love exist somewhere outside of ourselves, since we all have the potential for love and compassion.

King, Martin Luther Jr. Strength to Love. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

This book offers sermons and speeches presented by Martin Luther King Jr., which intrigued me through his call to love and altruism. King stated that love is dangerous, but necessary. It requires that we put others before ourselves, but in doing so we may transform society. In the chapter *Strength to Love*, he describes the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example of altruistic love. “The ultimate

measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy”(35). In *Love in Action* King describes our lip service to peace,. “We talk passionately about peace, and at the same time we assiduously prepare for war” (40). It may be easy to advocate for peace, but are we ready to truly accept the possibilities it confronts us with? Nonviolence is based on bravery, though people assume it is a method of the weak. What do we risk if we don’t act? Though peace is dangerous, is not the continuation of selfishness and violence more perilous?

Loom. 2005. Surain Rajadurai. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/raiden256/91067160/>> Retrieved April 20, 2006.

McDaniel, Judith. Sanctuary, A Journey. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1987.

This book shares the personal experiences of Judith McDaniel in the 1980’s Sanctuary Movement. During that time religious communities in the United States provided safe havens for Nicaraguan refugees denied asylum by the state. McDaniel also traveled to South America with *Witness for Peace*, and was held hostage. She also discussed her personal realizations of the risks of love, and that social justice issues are present everywhere. You don’t have to travel outside of your community to find violence, war zones and human need (130). In discussing a nun who had died in Latin America she claimed, “I began to think about what she was suggesting-that love itself was a risk and when we choose to love we open ourselves to the consequences of that loving” (142). What is peace worth to us?

Milosz, Czeslaw, ed. A Book of Luminous Things: An International

Anthology of Poetry. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996.

Milosz's book is an anthology of international poetry which spans a variety of topics. The poems inspired me by taking moments in time and nature, and bringing them to life with vibrant detail. Two poems in particular have sparked my imagination through examining natural subjects, imbuing them with action and reflection. *The Kingfisher* by Mary Oliver, and *View With a Grain of Sand* by Wislawa Szymborska are examples of visually rich poems which capture the beauty and mystery of nature in chosen moments. Oliver wrote, "When the wave snaps shut over his blue head, the water/ remains water-hunger is the only story/he has ever heard in his life that he could believe" (20). I would like to use the concise and active language expressed in these collected poems. The poems aided reflection on the interconnectedness and beauty of nature. Recognizing the connections among people and between humanity and nature may bring us closer to peace.

Morales, Aurora Levins and Rosario Morales. Getting Home Alive. Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1986.

Morales' poem *Bad Communist* inspired my poem *I Am Afraid*. Her poem speaks of the need to push for social change, despite hardships and the desire to give in. She states "I don't do these things as naturally as I breathe, the way I imagine *real* political people do, real communists, real socialists and feminists, real radicals, real troublemakers, real champions of the people"(159).

LaFollette, Robert M. A Personal Narrative of Political Experiences.

Madison, Wisconsin: The Robert M. LaFollette Co., 1927.

Natasha Fischer. 2006. Image from the personal collection of Kristen LaFollette.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. Call Me by My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1999.

Call me by My True Names is a compilation of many creative writing pieces of Thich Nhat Hanh. The poems span several decades and cover topics of peace, interconnectedness and meditative subjects. I came to this book through exploring Thich Nhat Hanh's writings, particularly the title piece *Call Me by My True Names*. Nhat Hanh expresses solidarity and co-responsibility in the title poem, and recognizes roles as victims and agents are important for nonviolence and love. He states, "I am a child in Uganda, all skin and bones,/my legs as thin as bamboo sticks./And I am the arms merchant,/ selling deadly weapons to Uganda"(72). I would like to use similar themes as Nhat Hanh, expressing solidarity, love, the desire for change and nonviolent imagery. I would like to show how people socially construct a violent structure and it is necessary to take responsibility to change it.

---. Love In Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993.

This collection of speeches and creative writing by Thich Nhat Hanh was a primary inspiration for my project. The book provides poems, short stories and speeches regarding the Vietnam War. The works apply the tools of peace for healing and greater social understanding. Last summer I read the book, and Nhat Hanh's words inspired great change in the way I view the world. It sparked my interest in theories of peace and love for humanity. "Love enables us to see things that those who are without love cannot see" (10). The short story the *Ancient Tree* is a wonderful representation of unity and self-sacrifice. I appreciate the patience expressed in his words, as well as the positive imagery which refuse to focus on violent representations in contrast to peace.

Nhat Hanh, Thich and Daniel Berrigan. The Raft is Not the Shore. Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001.

The Raft is Not the Shore contains transcribed dialogue between Thich Nhat Hanh and the priest Daniel Berrigan in 1974. Berrigan and Nhat Hanh were both opposed to the violence in Vietnam. They discuss how violence must be avoided, yet people hold onto nationalistic and religious sentiments to keep themselves from accepting the responsibilities of peace. As their dialogue shows, violence is not inevitable. However our commitment to the assumption that violence is unavoidable and inherent in human affairs continues the cycle of destruction. People must break from these limiting concepts and embrace the possibilities of genuine love and nonviolence. If we act in nonviolent ways, but do not believe they are effective, we will undermine our actions. If we believe violence is a given, then we will always be able to find violence.

Payne, January. “At Risk Before the Storm Struck”. The Washington Post.

13 Sept 2005.

Phipps, Carter. “Force of the Heart”. Interview with Michael Nagler. 11

Mar. 2003 What is Enlightenment? 25 Sep. 2005

<<http://www.wie.org/unbound/media.asp?id=17>>

In this recorded interview, Carter Phipps discusses meditation and the history of nonviolence with Michael Nagler. I found this interview online while researching Michael Nagler, who’s work influenced the idea for my capstone. Nagler discusses the need to make nonviolence a part of ourselves; so ingrained in our beings that it becomes second nature. He also describes the negative characterization of nonviolence. “The way to find out what nonviolence is and how it works, is not to start by thinking up a situation where it couldn’t work; but then what have you got? Nothing.” We must start by knowing that nonviolence is effective , powerful and worthwhile.

Robert La Follette and Kristen LaFollette. 2005. Image from the personal collection of Kristen LaFollette.

Schley, Jim and Ann Aspell eds. Against Certainty: Poets for Peace

Anthology. Montpelier: Chapiteau Press, 2003.

This chapbook utilizes refined poetic craft and skill. It is one in a series of books produced through peace readings given in the United States and abroad since the

1990s. I enjoy its succinct yet provocative poems. I would like to personify the same hope that Ellen Bass' "The Thing Is" does. She claims life is like a face that we must embrace and despite our pain say, "Yes, I will take you/I will love you, again." I would like for these poems to help me stay focused on specific instances and concrete images and not get caught up in theoretical abstractions. Though many of the poems are written in opposition to violence, they provide useful questions to ask as to where violence comes from. Why do we not have room for peace, yet make ample space for violence?

Secondary Social Action Content Research Sources

King, Ursula. “Theories of Love: Sorokin, Teilhard, and Tillich”. *Zygon*, 39:1 March (2004)

This intriguing article discusses the similar theories of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Pitirim A. Sorokin, and opens up new possibilities of envisioning the power of love. Both were scientists who recognized the possibilities of the power of love. They saw love as a higher form of human energy and a creative power which affects physical forces (78). These independent researchers both sought to make love a quantifiable force, to be studied and harnessed(93). They also discuss how love may provide a protective web over the earth (a *noosphere*) which would operate like our ozone (84). I had not imagined love as a physical property and the article opened me up to new visual representations.

Nagler, Michael. Is There No Other Way? : The Search for a Nonviolent Future. Hawaii: Inner Ocean Publishing, Inc., 2001.

Is There No Other Way? is a book which takes the reader gradually through the process of accepting the power of nonviolence. This book was listed as an additional resource in one of Michael Nagler’s articles. The book asserts that nonviolence provides answers to many of life’s problems, but endows responsibilities. He asserts peace is a matter of training. We must retrain ourselves and our society to redirect its efforts. Nagler describes peace in easily digestible terms, “So it’s a great relief to get our finger, finally, on the pulse of the

problem, even if it turns out that we're holding our own wrist" (48). Here violence is an illness, and peace is the cure. I realized that accepting peace means being willing to have hope.

---. **"Nonviolence and Peacemaking Today". ReVision. 20:2 Fall (1997):**

12.

In this article Michael Nagler describes the violence that exists in our lives and in our psyches. This article was related to other works written by Nagler. He describes the unity of life whereas violence disrupts the implicit harmony. "Violence is the state of wanting another's harm, and that very state is itself a violation, a forcing, namely of the implicit unity of life." The article made me realize that we are limited by the boundaries of our imaginations and the social structures we erect within those confines. Nagler discusses how we view peace as unrealistic, and deliberately choose to ignore its significance. I hope my poems may allow people to celebrate nonviolence as important, possible and effective.

---. **"Peacemaking Through Nonviolence". <<http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/nagler.html>>**

This article became the foundational inspiration for my capstone project. It discusses the failures of the UN peacekeeping force in Yugoslavia and elsewhere. He asserts that the failure of armed peacekeeping is due to its flawed ideology. It is based on the assumption that all effective power is violent. He discusses Force One (coercion) and Force Two (love/persuasion) power. The critique helped me to see that we lock ourselves into cycles of violence by supporting the

dichotomous relationship of power to violence and peace. Only through truly adopting peace as the most powerful force, may we see change in the world.

hooks, bell. “A Life in The Spirit: Reflections on Faith and Politics”.

ReVision. 15:3 Winter (1993): 99.

In this article, hooks relates her experience with spiritual journey and transformation. She describes how the creativity of her spiritual experience conveyed itself through her political and social actions. hooks views spirituality as liberation. She claims, “I learned then that it was not enough to identify with the poor, one had to act to transform society and human lives so that we would all have access to paradise.” She links the need to connect doctrine with social action to transform beliefs and create a better world. hooks rejects the traditional western religious notion of the duality of the world as good versus evil. She encounters the need for compassion in transformative change.

Appendices

Appendix A:
Interdisciplinary Reflective Essay

Interdisciplinary Reflective Essay

The Humanities and Communication curriculum has challenged my perceptions of self and my relation to the world, as well as provided me with ample opportunities to gain valuable insights into structures of power and resistance. Each semester that I have been a part of this program, my awareness has expanded through assignments, class discussions and required reflection on my personal connections to knowledge and identity. Particular classes have pushed beyond traditional pedagogies and caused me to discover my own paths of engagement as a student.

Over the past three years at this university, my critical thinking skills and ethics have been enriched and broadened through in-class and personal experiences. My participation in the Creative Writing and Social Action program has allowed me to recognize the process of writing to serve as witness for the promotion of social justice. The coursework has also exposed me to a variety of disciplines, and allowed me to explore subjects which I was previously not attracted to. Based on my work as a Humanities and Communication student, I was also given the opportunity to attend a conference in Washington D.C.

As a community college student, I had intended to transfer and pursue a psychology degree at UC Davis. During the application process, almost by chance, I came across California State University at Monterey Bay. I felt very drawn towards the unique educational experience offered at this small personal school. Yet, I was initially disappointed at the lack of Psychology classes offered through Social and Behavioral Sciences. I searched through the course catalog and came across the Humanities and Communication Major. For several years I had foregone my interest in writing and

pursued education in the social sciences. Humanities and Communication seemed to tap into my interest in writing and social change. The variety of interdisciplinary classes offered fascinated me. I encountered classes which dealt with oral history, film analysis, restorative justice, feminism, creative writing and other various humanities issues, instead of purely English courses. I was particularly interested in critical examinations of culture and gender analysis. The faculty and staff I met while visiting the campus also created a warm and inviting environment, in which I felt my contributions were desired. In place of attending UC Davis, I enrolled in California State University at Monterey Bay.

Though I knew the Humanities and Communication curriculum was innovative, I was previously unaware of the distinctive interdisciplinary environment it provided. I was not accustomed to the student-centered teaching styles utilized in the classrooms. Rather than courses in which professors stood in front of students lecturing for hours on end, these new classes required genuine student involvement and preparedness. Inside the classrooms, students and professors would position their desks to form a large circle in which everyone had to face each other. It was no longer easy to hide in the corner and sleep, or come unprepared for classroom discussions. Professors spent much of their time seated at the same level as students, to facilitate and engage in discussions rather than seeking to contain every instance of learning.

Classrooms became centers of reciprocal learning where not all knowledge was held by the professor. In place of reinforcing hierarchies of power, these new arrangements necessitated student involvement and professors committed to learn along with their students. Students were encouraged and required to reflect on their own connections to knowledge. We all shared our experiences related to the classroom

topics and discussed readings to gauge our reactions and interpretations of the texts.

The classrooms required active learning where participation was vital. I could no longer go entire sessions without uttering any words or discussing issues; I had to be involved every time.

Though the classes I experienced involved a variety of topics, they each reinforced similar themes. Several issues and lessons from different classes seemed to speak to each other. I have actually found many connections between the Humanities and Communication curriculum and my Global Studies courses. During Fall 2004, I was able to enroll in the combined Global Studies and Humanities and Communication class HCOM 342 *Militarism and Feminism*, which fulfills MLO 5. This class introduced me to the Global Studies curriculum. I was impressed by the awareness of the Global Studies students and appreciated the major's teaching styles. After that class I enrolled in GS 360 *Religion Violence and Peacemaking*. I really enjoyed the class and decided to pursue a minor in Global Studies. The course had established my interest in Peace Studies which would later be reinforced through the HCOM 432S Service Learning class. I am excited that I have been able to synthesize the two programs which compliment each other and have developed my awareness of social justice issues.

I was also very fortunate to become involved in the *Latina Life Stories* digital storytelling class in which I created the iMovie, "Fighting for My History". Though I was originally intimidated by the workload of the class, ultimately it became one of the best experiences I have had at this university. Professor Benmayor's class, HCOM 328, which encompasses MLO 2, enabled me to reflect on my own conceptions of self related to history through theories presented in class. Utilizing the tradition of the *testimonio*, which emphasizes the importance of history and witnessing our own lives, my story

observed the link between my personal ancestral ties and definitions of self. The story was based on research of my genealogical connection to Robert M. LaFollette. When I first enrolled at CSUMB, Professor Payne Adler, my advisor, remarked on my genealogy and link to Robert La Follette. Her observation began my thinking on the relationship between my heritage and my current life, which this class provided an opportunity to explore. LaFollette was a Progressive party leader who governed the state of Wisconsin early in the 20th Century, and became an outspoken advocate for social justice while serving as a senator in Washington D.C. By recognizing my family history as a source of strength, I connected my commitment to advocacy with my ancestor's life, and replaced previous social exclusion with a sense of belonging. Through the creation of the project, history became my motivation and source of pride. I now desire to extend this family legacy to future generations in appreciation of the connections to my past which were not visible before.

The production of my digital story also led to further opportunities in the following semester. Professor Benmayor invited me to attend the "Visible Knowledge Project" conference at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. to present my film. I was extremely honored to attend the conference. The journey provided me with not only academic experience, but personal awareness as well. I met faculty from across the country and listened to their opinions about education and the learning process. I was also able to network with other students and discuss their learning experiences. The trip allowed me to gain confidence and begin to view myself as an adult who has the potential to make important contributions to the world. I realized that my work is valid and recognized by others.

The new confidence I gained has empowered me to integrate disciplines that reflect my commitment to social change, particularly in the design of my Capstone project. My Capstone intends to integrate creative writing, global awareness, and the call for social justice. It incorporates ideas I have been exposed to in Global Studies classes, which were reinforced through Humanities and Communication, Service Learning, Philosophical Analysis and Cooperative Argumentation. My Capstone project along with my tailored education has fused my major and minor coursework and learning experiences. My Capstone particularly reflects my experience in the HCOM 432S Service Learning course. Through that class I was exposed to firsthand accounts of peace work in action. I saw how peace has the ability to change individuals and present various rewarding opportunities.

When I reflected on my coursework, I realized that the issues I was attracted to related back to compassion for others and the desire for social change. Though individually my research projects and work encountered a variety of subjects, they shared underlying motivations of peace. Peace was the subject which bound all of my concerns together, and I decided I could not approach my Capstone too narrowly and ignore the larger themes which influenced many issues. My Capstone allowed me to see that the structures of violence cause many diverse conflicts, while peace offers important and potent solutions. The project enabled me to analyze the roots of my perspective in relationship to my actions.

The process of designing this project presented me with several challenges. I was excited to design a portfolio of my choosing, but a bit daunted by the endless possibilities for my subject. I want the Capstone to represent my body of knowledge and acquired skills, and encompass my educational experience. Yet, my desire to make the

project outstanding and successful proved to be somewhat of a burden. I spent time in fear of failure rather than in productive action.

In designing my Capstone, I intended to address several MLO's offered through my major. I integrated knowledge from MLO 4, the *Ways of Knowing* course. This class exposed me to a variety of philosophical perspectives and discussed issues of peace, social responsibility, and ethics. The MLO 1 *Cooperative Argumentation* class reminded me of the need to create an inviting argument through my project. I integrated basic tenets of the course in my introduction to the personal reflection essay. I outline basic vocabulary for the project and define them, so that readers may address peace utilizing common terms. Finally, my project involves Creative Writing. Through MLO 8 I have gained skills to create poetry which comprises my creative portfolio.

It has been difficult to produce a portfolio of creative work expressing my connections to peace. Peace is such a broad and often theoretical topic, to approach it through concrete visuals and instances became a complicated task. Initially I intended to address the general public, to prove that peace is possible and effective. My work became a bit preachy and abstract. I struggled to express the realizations I had made, without distancing the work from my audience. Eventually, I was guided to approach the project more as a memoir to explain my personal realizations and provide concrete examples as a model of change.

The personal reflective essay also became a complicated challenge. I have no experience combining research with personal reflection. I found that I approached much of the project from a research perspective, rather than a creative process. This focus on research proved to stall much of my creative inspiration and I encountered many artistic roadblocks. I attempted to include too much in the essay out of fear of excluding

important aspects of my research, and I felt I did not have many models to work from. Though I worry that my project is not wholly representative of my potential, I have gained a much better understanding of the process involved in producing scholarly work.

I hope that this project does make peace accessible in some ways to people who perhaps have doubted it. Through my education at CSUMB I have experienced a positive personal transformation and know that change is possible and necessary. I have witnessed the application of love and compassion in the work of others. Through this project, readers may glimpse a representation of what I have experienced. It would be rewarding if people chose to reflect on themselves, and critically examine their habits and motivations. Perhaps, people might ask, why is violence considered so powerful? Who benefits from this violence? Why haven't I given peace a chance in my own life, and what do I stand to gain from serving peace?

This project combined with my education has cemented my desire to work for change in myself, my community and the world. I recognize that every action I take should serve a purpose. All of my work and writing can work towards and be aligned with peace. If I want peace to become a reality, it must be manifested in myself and my actions. After graduation, I would like to pursue work in non-governmental organizations which strive for change, and eventually attend graduate school. My education has clarified and supported my internal perspectives as well as deepened my understandings of social justice, and issues of dominance. The Humanities and Communication Department has brought me new awareness, and I now know that I am an instrument of change.

Appendix B: E-Poster

HCOM Senior Capstone

Digital Poster

Spring 2006

Name:

Kristen Ana LaFollette

Project Title:

From Fists to Words: A Revolutionized Awareness Based On Peace

Concentration:

Creative Writing and Social Action, Global Studies minor

Project Abstract

"From Fists to Words: A Revolutionized Awareness Based on Peace" links my experience as student of the Creative Writing and Social Action, and Global Studies programs. This project intends to demonstrate my personal process of transformation, through the acceptance of peace, to serve as an inspiration for those who are willing to undergo a similar internal revolution.

Project Context & Contributions

This project embodies my inner process and catalogs personal realizations and transformations about peace and violence, which begin during childhood and lead up to the present time. It articulates my current questions and fears and illustrates the concepts I have encountered through my research and growth.

Relevant Links

Shambala Sun Online
bell hooks interview:
<http://www.shambhalasun.com/revolving_themes/thich_nhat_hanh/hooks_answer_fear_understanding.htm>

"Peacemaking Through Nonviolence" article:
<<http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pacs/nagler.html>>



Natasha. Kristen LaFollette, 2005.

Excerpt of Creative Work

180

...I felt like, my hands
were getting all sweaty
and I felt, I just felt like/
I hope I can do this.

... I remember ... walking
in,
and... after a couple of
hours of working /
in that same shelter, my
perspective completely did
a 180,/
you know what I mean?.../

I got this feeling of
comfortable...And that's
weird/
... I feel like as comfortable
as I would in my own
house.

Important Quote

"The way must be in you; the destination must also be in you and not somewhere else in space or time. If that kind of self-transformation is being realized in you, you will arrive." Thich Nhat Hanh, *On Building a Community of Love*.

Project Format

My Capstone employs six poems, one dramatic monologue, a narrative personal essay and an interdisciplinary reflection essay to serve as proof that change is possible through a commitment to the power of peace, nonviolence, love and altruism.

Selected Bibliography

- King, Martin Luther Jr. Strength to Love. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- Nagler, Michael. Is There No Other Way? : The Search for a Nonviolent Future. Hawaii: Inner Ocean Publishing, Inc., 2001.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich. Love In Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich and Daniel Berrigan. The Raft is Not the Shore. Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001.